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ABSTRACT

A total of 48 mother-infant pairs were observed and rated in face-to-face interaction when the infant was 4 months old, and in the Ainsworth Strange Situation when the infant was 12 months old. Mothers' marital satisfaction and social support, and the involvement and support of the child's father, were assessed. The mothers constituted a low socioeconomic status, racially mixed sample. Results indicated no effects of infant birth status or gender, maternal age, race, or marital status on the infant's attachment classification at 12 months. Results also indicated that the father's involvement predicted the infant's attachment classification at 12 months. Maternal behavior at 4 months, marital satisfaction, and social support did not predict attachment classification. (BC)

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MEDIATORS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN MATERNAL BEHAVIOR AT 4-MONTHS AND INFANT ATTACHMENT AT 12-MONTHS

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ABSTRACT

Empirical work has generally confirmed the relations of social support, marital satisfaction, positive attitudes toward parenting and toward the child, and more optimal childrearing behaviors. The present study aimed to extend the existing empirical literature on relations among maternal interactive behavior at 4-months, social support, the marital relationship, and infant-mother attachment at 12-months.

In this racially mixed, low SES sample, 48 mother-infant pairs were observed at 4-months during face-to-face interaction and at 12-months in the Strange Situation. Thirty-one percent of infants were classified A, 55% B, and 14% C. No effects for infant birth status, infant gender, maternal age, race, parity, and marital status on attachment classification were found. Father involvement predicted A, B, or C classification at 12-months. Maternal behavior at 4-months, marital satisfaction, and social support did not predict attachment classification. thus, among a low SES sample, father/partner involvement in childcare at 4-months predicted infant attachment classification after controlling for maternal behavior at 4-months, marital satisfaction, and social support.

INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

The purpose of the present study was to extend the existing empirical literature on relations among maternal interactive behavior at 4-months, social support, the marital relationship, father/partner involvement, and infant-mother attachment at 12-months in a low SES, racially mixed sample.

The quality of infant-mother attachment at 12-months results from ongoing mother-infant interaction.

It is often asserted that the marital relationship is the primary support system during the transition to parenthood, and that it influences subsequent development of positive mother-infant relationships (Belsky, 1984).

Father/partner involvement in childcare (instrumental support) and couple communication (emotional support) are associated with optimal parenting (Belsky et al., 1984; Authors et al., 1990; Cox et al., 1989).

Support from the social network also influences maternal parenting behavior (Crnic et al., 1983; Stevens, 1988; Weinraub & Wolf, 1983) and is an important predictor of attachment (Crockenberg, 1981; Crnic et al., 1983; Stevens, 1988; Weinraub & Wolf, 1983).

However, marital relationships, social support networks, father/partner involvement, and couple communication may not be equally influential in determining optimal parenting.

In particular, marriage, social support, and father/partner involvement may play different roles in low SES groups of mothers than in middle class mothers who have been more typically studied.

METHODS

SUBJECTS:

61 low income mother-infant pairs: 38 black/23 white; 32 male/ 29 female; age ranged from 15 to 40; parity from 1 to 5.

PROCEDURE:

At 4 months, mothers and infants were videotaped in a laboratory setting for 3 minutes of unstructured face-to-face interaction. Mothers were instructed to play with their infants as they typically would at home.

At 12 months, mothers and infants were videotaped in the standardized Strange Situation (Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969).

MEASURES:

PREDICTORS:

* MARITAL SATISFACTION: 4 scores: 1) total marital satisfaction, 2) positive feelings about the relationship, 3) satisfaction with the amount of time spent together as a couple, and 4) dissatisfaction with the relationship (Spanier, 1976; Spanier & Thomas, 1982).

* SOCIAL SUPPORT: 4 scores: 1) total social support, 2) emotional support, 3) instrumental support, and 4) satisfaction with support (Berkman, 1977; Berkman & Breslow, 1983).

* FATHER/PARTNER INVOLVEMENT: 3 scores: 1) total father/ partner involvement, 2) maternal report of father's instrumental support, 3) maternal report of father's emotional support.

MATERNAL INTERACTIVE BEHAVIOR

* Rated every 15 seconds: facial expression; vocal expression; position and body contact with the infant; expression of affection; contingency of response to infant; and control of interaction (adapted from the Child-Adult Relationship Experimental Index, "CARE Index," Crittenden, 1988).

* Yielded 4 summary scores: 1) Responsive, 2) Inept, 3) Unresponsive, and 4) Mutual Play.

INFANT-MOTHER ATTACHMENT

* Infants were classified according to Ainsworth et al. (1978) classification procedure. Two coders, trained to reliability with L.A. Sroufe criterion tapes, independently classified every baby with 88% reliability.

RESULTS

I. INFANT ATTACHMENT CLASSIFICATION

1. Complete data was available for 48 mother-infant pairs:

   A = 31% (15)
   B = 55% (27)
   C = 14% (6)

2. Preliminary analyses indicated no effects of infant birth status, infant gender, maternal age, race, parity, and marital status on attachment classification.

II. CORRELATES WITH MATERNAL INTERACTIVE BEHAVIOR AT 4-MONTHS

1. FATHER/PARTNER INVOLVEMENT AT 4-MONTHS (full sample of married & unmarried women):

   - Father/partner Emotional, Instrumental, and Total Support scores were correlated with Maternal Interactive Behavior (n=61)

   - Emotional Support correlated with Maternal Inept behavior ($r = -.28$, $p<.01$)

   - Instrumental Support correlated with Maternal Control ($r = .27$, $p<.02$)

   - Total Father/partner involvement correlated with Inept ($r = -.26$, $p<.02$) and Control ($r = .27$, $p<.02$)

III. PREDICTORS OF INFANT ATTACHMENT CLASSIFICATION

1. MATERNAL INTERACTIVE BEHAVIOR AT 4-MONTHS (full sample of married & unmarried women):

   - Positive, Inept, Negative, Control, and Summary scores entered into Discriminant analysis (n=48)

   - Maternal interactive behaviors at 4-months did not predict infant attachment classification

2. MARITAL SATISFACTION (married/cohabiting subsample):

   - Marital Satisfaction, Total Social Support, and Father/partner involvement entered into Discriminant analysis (n=19)

   - Marital Satisfaction, Total Social Support, and Father/partner involvement did not predicted attachment classification.

3. NON-MARITAL SOURCES OF SUPPORT (full sample of married & unmarried women):

   - Emotional, Instrumental, Satisfaction with Support, Father/partner Emotional Support, and Father/partner Instrumental Support scores entered into Discriminant analysis (n=48)

   - Emotional, Instrumental, Satisfaction with Support, and Father/partner Emotional Support did not predict infant attachment classification (Table 1)

   - Father/partner Instrumental Support did predict infant attachment classification (Table 1)

4. SOCIAL SUPPORT & FATHER/PARTNER INVOLVEMENT (full sample of married & unmarried women):

   - Total Social Support, Father/partner Emotional Support, and Father/partner Instrumental Support scores entered into Discriminant analysis (n=48)

   - Neither Total Social Support nor Father/partner Emotional Support predicted infant attachment classification (Table 2)

   - Father/partner Instrumental Support did predict infant attachment classification (Table 2)

5. ASPECTS OF FATHER/PARTNER INVOLVEMENT (full sample of married and unmarried women):

   - Father/partner Emotional, Instrumental, and Total Father/partner Support entered into Discriminant analysis (n=48)

   - Father/partner Emotional Support did not predict infant attachment classification (Table 3)

   - Father/partner Total Support was not a strong predictor of infant attachment classification (Table 3)

   - Father/partner Instrumental Support predicted infant attachment classification (Table 3)

CONCLUSIONS

Maternal age, infant birth status, infant gender, race, parity, and marital status failed to differentiate attachment groups.

Marital satisfaction and non-marital sources of support at 4-months were not predictive of infant attachment at 12-months.

Maternal interactive behavior at 4-months was not predictive of infant attachment at 12-months.

However, Father/partner involvement was significantly correlated with maternal Inept behavior and maternal Control.

Further, Father/partner instrumental support at 4-months was an important predictor of infant attachment at 12-months after other aspects of the support network were controlled.

Therefore, in this racially mixed sample of low SES mothers, father/partner involvement in childcare was the only variable that consistently distinguished infant attachment groups, particularly after controlling for other aspects of the support system.

IMPLICATIONS

The importance for optimal parenting of marital satisfaction, social support, couple communication, and father/partner involvement in childcare may vary among mothers of different socioeconomic groups. Furthermore, while these are all sources of maternal support in the transition to parenting, they may serve quite different functions in parenting.

In this low SES, racially mixed sample, marital satisfaction, non-marital sources of support, and couple communication at 4-months did not moderate the quality of the infant-mother attachment relationship at 12-months to the extent suggested by earlier research.

However, father/partner involvement in childcare appears to be an important influence, both on maternal interactive behavior at 4-months and infant attachment at 12-months.

Perhaps father/partner involvement with childcare relieves mother of the stress of caring for a new infant and influences her feelings of satisfaction with parenting.

These findings suggest the importance of studying the specific factors of father/partner involvement that influence maternal behavior and infant development, particularly in families that differ from the white, middle class samples typically studied.

Furthermore, the attitudes and behavior that influence father/partner participation in childcare, along with maternal expectations for and satisfaction with father/partner involvement may clarify the important role of fathers/partners in influencing the development of the parent-child relationship.

Table 1. Non-marital Sources of Support as Predictors of Attachment (Discriminant Analysis)

SUPPORT	UNIV. F	SIGN.	STAND. COEFF.	R WITH DISC. FUNC.
Father Emotional	.12	.73	-.57	.12
Father Instrumental	5.37	.02*	1.17	.83
Emotional	.06	.81	.16	.09
Instrumental	.21	.65	-.46	-.16
Satisfaction	.22	.64	-.03	-.17

Table 2. Social Support & Father/partner Involvement as Predictors of Attachment (Discriminant analysis)

SUPPORT	UNIV. F	SIGN.	STAND. COEFF.	R WITH DISC. FUNC.
Total Social Support	.23	.63	-.44	-.18
Father Emotional	.12	.73	-.36	.13
Father Instrumental	5.38	.02*	1.15	.84

Table 3. Aspects of Father/partner Involvement as Predictors of Attachment (Discriminant analysis)

SUPPORT	UNIV. F	SIGN.	STAND. COEFF.	R WITH DISC. FUNC.
Father Emotional	.94	.40	-.14	.35
Father Instrumental	4.10	.02*	1.06	.99
Total Father Involv.	2.58	.08	---	.76

* = $p<.05$